


AN ORIENT PAPERBACK

edited by  
gauri deshpane  
an anthology of  
indo-english poetry



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Indo English Poetry***

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## Foreword

ENGLISH POETRY IN INDIA HAS NOT MADE GREAT strides in the past decade. Kamala Das and Nissim Ezekiel still continue to be the ones to bring out consistently good work. Daruwalla has now been added to their names. The rest have developed in so haphazard and back and forth a manner as to make gain difficult to assess. However a few significant advances need to be noted. First this poetry has lost its self-consciousness. There are as many poets writing today in English as in any of the regional languages. No special merit or stigma attaches to writing in English. Also it has cast off its derivative origins and is now based as poetry in all languages not on an alien literature but on the life and experiences of the poets who write it. These writers are concerned with the work of writers in other languages not as models but as literary experience. Third, this writing now seems to have become commercially viable. In the last few years no less than 5 anthologies and as many journals making space for original Indian writing in

English have been marketed. Finally the poetry is serious. It is no longer the spare time activity of dilettanti but a major preoccupation of its writers.

In spite of all this optimism and self congratulation are a little premature because of some sad and obvious facts on the debit side. The most glaring is a paucity of diction. There are a few poets in whom gauntness is the deliberate effect of pruning (like Parthasarathy) but in many an individual poet a repetitiveness of vocabulary, phraseology and construction is noticeable. In a poet like Pritish Nandy it is too pervasive to be anything but laziness. Only after wading through thirty unrewarding pages does one come across a lyric like *Near Desha priya Park*. In someone like Kamala Das this paucity is more a matter of echoes of familiar moods in all her work and is clearly the result of a subject matter that quickly catagorises itself (She and in general all the women poets must be given credit however, for coming to terms with the man woman relationship in blunt bitter and concrete terms where the men still pussyfoot around in metaphor metaphysics and roundaboutation).

Not that repetition or bareness in themselves are an evil but in the general absence of vivid strange rich or startling usage they suggest that the poet is played out rather than controlled or understated. K.D. Katrak is one of the very few exceptions delighting in a multi textured abstruse and strange vocabulary. In the field of imagery on the other

hand the poets have gained by adhering to concrete and actual images which lend their work immediacy and verisimilitude. British Nandy alone tends still to an incredible landscape divorced from all reality, that is interesting for its quaint fantasy if not repeated too often. To illustrate what I mean by an economical use of everyday language to create a fresh and yet realistic image take Parthasarathy's line. A storm of churches breaks about my eyes. To see how strange and mysterious words can still make a vivid and actual image take a look at this, from Katrak. Do not be taken in. Let not memory of your mother's lap / Nostalgic prancing on a sister's knee / love of your wife's mouth / becloud what remains of reason / As you watch Her sit amidst oceanic grapes and olives / The crescent moon chained to her mundane slippers / Her mantle of stars beginning to glow / As our Father Sun slips to his perihelion under water / Butchered as usual sent to his burial station / In under belly of octopus and squid. And compare these two images for immediacy, verisimilitude, economy or strangeness with these lines from Nandy, which seem as though they have no real reason to stop flowing since they are devoid of context or meaning and their only *raison d'être* is sound. since you spoke of history and the wild rose withering on a familiar face when mysterious tangents of sense intersect each other and the sun blinds with gold the filigreed leaves on a battered soul.

The more damaging defect of Indian poetry in English is its slavish involvement with King's



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Not that repetition or bareness in themselves are an evil but in the general absence of vivid strange rich or startling usage they suggest that the poet is played out rather than controlled or understated. K D Katrak is one of the very few exceptions delighting in a multi textured abstruse and strange vocabulary. In the field of imagery on the other

and seems to be turning back to it now most of the poets have stuck to free verse K D Katrak's two books contain some poems in the stanza form and some others like Rakshat Puri and Parthasarathy use the unrhymed stanza in a more or less arbitrary and whimsical form

I record here sadly the absence of light hearted verse This is not to say that we are solemn bores but on the whole we are lacking a sense of wryness about life Life is seen dramatically with a response almost exclusively emotional Here again as always there are a few exceptions but not enough to detract substantially from the above statement There are Ezekiel's poems for children (For Kalpana and 'For Elkana, included here) there is the second book of K.D Katrak's verses there are a couple of poems even by Daruwalla (The Contrariness of Dreams not included here) and Parthasarathy (Breasts in his long poem Touch, included here) But even in the work of these writers such poems are a rarity There has never been a large output of light verse in India in English not even limericks or doggerel Incidentally, while working as a poetry selector for a large weekly some time ago I found a goodly number of sly humorous and satirical verses in the daily post It is true that the quality left a lot to be desired but the impulse was there Amateur poets from students to stock brokers were moved to write humorous verse Why then do the salient practitioners of verse suppress it totally? Even irony is only marginally present

English as it was handed out in schools and colleges Except for Nissim Ezekiel (his poems in Indian English) none made a serious effort to change the standard English learnt from textbooks And even Ezekiel spoils the effort finally by writing down or with a humorous intent only in Indian English The rest have been content with an exclamatory interpolation or two a few words denoting family relationships a few historical or mythical allusions that cannot be anglicised This failure is even more serious in the face of the strange and wonderful changes wrought in prose rhythms and constructions by fiction writers like Raja Rao to say nothing of such startling usage as black American speech Neither has the Indian English poet experimented with form if you set aside such bizarre forays in other arts as visual poetry pictorial poetry and typographical poetry The prose poems of Prithvi Nandy and Kamala Das are the only experiments and they too are not innovations in the field only in the Indian English branch of it Some examples are included in this volume and since the devices used,—strong prose rhythms alterations repetitions internal rhythm—are common to both prose and poetry it must be left to the reader to decide whether to call them prosepoetry or poetic prose Perhaps it was not too unreasonable to expect especially the Indian poet to assay some daring experiment in form for all of us are well acquainted with the totally different poetics of at least one Indian language It is true nevertheless that none has attempted a fusion of Indian and English metres Also with the exception of Ezekiel who wrote in the rhymed stanza form till 1964 (*The Exact Name*)

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On the same grounds I would acquit the Indian English poet of lacking a social consciousness. One might rail against him as a *man* for not having what one classifies as a social conscience but as a poet he must be allowed to choose his subject where he feels most strongly. It is ridiculous to fault a poet like Kamala Das on account of her predominantly personal subject matter. If any one of us is gifted enough both with poetic ability and a social conscience *and* the capacity to combine them more power to him but if not let him to himself be true. That way we avoid the supreme hypocrisy of lip service mouthing undigested philosophies empty platitudes and sterile pity. Anyone reading poems like Gieve Patels *Public Hospital* *Peeradina's Bandra* my own *Elegy for a Friend* or Ezekiel's *Entertainment* cannot escape being aware of the self-disgust evident there. This too, is social conscience, but with a sad sort of an anger and not the revolutionary violence which the pundits of social change would have every one feel. Perhaps the understatement and the resigned awareness of futility are not loud enough for everyone to notice it cannot be denied that they too are a strong and insistent species of an awareness of the 40 per cent that live below the level of poverty around us.

The three major omissions from this volume Dom Moraes Ramanujan and P Lal would strike most readers. The first two can hardly be called Indian any more having spent most of the last decade abroad and having settled there in spite of visits home. P Lal has been engaged almost entirely

upon his mammoth transcreation of the *Mahabharata* over the last few years and has not produced significant original work during that time. Since I have tried to get the most recent work of the poets included here he had to be left out. A few other poets whose collections are not particularly noteworthy but whose individual talent is encouraging are here with one poem each. The other so-called more established poets are represented by five to ten poems each (with the exception of Adil Jussawalla) thus making this a representative, yet select volume of the most recent English poetry in India. There can be many opinions: depending upon the editor's taste about how many more poets should have been included and who they should have been. That is a matter of individual idiosyncrasy. There can hardly be any cavilling however about those that are here.

I urge upon the reader again the deft touch in the medium of Kamala Das and Nissim Ezekiel. Rakshat Puri and Parthasarathy are representative of the more cerebral and economical kind of poetry. A. D. Katrak is lush provocative and very readable. Nandy is innovative and profuse. Patel understated analytical but powerfully affecting. Daruwalla surprising stimulating vivid and one of the very best. A good and satisfying crop.

GAURI DESHPANDE

## NISSIM EZEKIEL

Born 1924

*Reader in American Literature University of Bombay Five collections of verse including The Unfinished Man (1960) and The Exact Name (1965) Also Three Plays (1969) Editor An Emerson Reader, A Martin Luther King Reader, A Rajaji Reader Indian Writers in Conference Writing in India etc Has written and broadcast extensively on art and literature Was Visiting Professor University of Leeds 1964 Lectured and gave readings of his poems at a number of American colleges and universities in 1967 Member General Council Lalit Kala Akademi and Sahitya Akademi General Editor Indian Poetry Series and University Textbook Series He is married with three children and lives in Bombay*



# Nissim Ezekiel

## Island

Unsuitable for song as well as sense  
the island flowers into slums  
and skyscrapers reflecting  
precisely the growth of my mind  
I am here to find my way in it

Sometimes I cry for help  
but mostly keep my own counsel  
I hear distorted echoes  
of my own ambiguous voice  
and of dragons claiming to be human

Bright and tempting breezes  
flow across the island  
separating past from future  
then the air is still again  
as I sleep the sleep of ignorance

How delight the soul with absolute  
sense of salvation how  
hold to a single willed direction ?  
I cannot leave the island  
I was born here and belong

Even now a host of miracles  
hurries me to daily business  
minding the ways of the island  
as a good native should  
taking calm and clamour in my stride

## Entertainment

The monkey show is on—  
patient girl on haunches  
holds the strings  
a baby in her arms  
Two tiny monkeys  
in red and purple pantaloons  
prepare to dance  
Crowd collects  
forms a circle  
Naked to the waist  
the Master of Ceremonies  
drums frenzy cracks whip  
calls the tricks  
to earn applause and copper coins  
The circle thickens as the plot thickens  
children laugh the untouchable women  
smooth their hair A coolie  
grins at me his white teeth  
gleam in the sunlight  
Only the monkeys are sad  
and suddenly  
the baby begins to cry  
Anticipating time for payment  
the crowd dissolves  
some in shame part  
with the smallest coin they have,  
the show moves on

## Goodbye Party For Miss Pushpa T S

t

Friends  
our dear sister  
is departing for foreign  
in two three days  
and  
we are meeting today  
to wish her bon voyage

You are all knowing friends  
what sweetness is in *Miss Pushpa*  
I don't mean only external sweetness  
but internal sweetness  
*Miss Pushpa* is smiling and smiling  
even for no reason  
but simply because she is feeling

*Miss Pushpa* is coming  
from very high family  
Her father was renowned advocate  
in Bulsar or Surat  
I am not remembering now which place

Surat ? Ah yes  
once only I stayed in Surat  
with family members  
of my uncle's very old friend—

his wife was cooking nicely  
that was long time ago

Coming back to Miss Pushpa  
she is most popular lady  
with men also and ladies also

Whenever I asked her to do anything  
she was saying Just now only  
I will do it That is showing  
good spirit I am always  
appreciating the good spirit

*Pushpa* Miss is never saying no  
whatever I or anybody is asking  
she is always saying yes  
and today she is going  
to improve her prospects  
and we are wishing her bon voyage

Now I ask other speakers to speak  
and afterwards Miss Pushpa  
will do the summing up

## **Cry**

Breathe  
My breath  
And let me  
Breathe yours  
Bodies  
Savouring  
Phenomena  
Sifting  
Passion  
To the fine  
Point  
Of penetration  
Luminous  
Obscene  
Noumena  
Breath  
Of my  
Breath of my  
Being

## On Bellasis Road

I see her first  
as colour only  
poised against the faded  
red of a post box  
purple sari yellow blouse  
green bangles orange  
flowers in her hair

A moment later  
I sense her as a woman  
bare as her feet  
beneath the shimmer

Then I look at her  
the colour disappears  
she's short thin and dark  
without a cage to her name  
as low as she can go

She doesn't glance at me  
waiting for her  
hawker or mill worker  
coolie or bird man  
fortune teller  
pavement man of medicine  
or street barber on the move

I see her image now  
as through a telescope  
without a single  
desperate moral  
to keep it in focus  
remote and close up  
Of what use then to see and think ?  
I cannot even say I care or do not care  
perhaps it ■ a kind of despair



## For Ellana

The warm April evening  
tempts us to the breezes  
sauntering across the lawn  
We drag our chairs down  
the stone steps and plant them there  
unevenly to sit or rather sprawl  
in silence till the words begin to come  
My wife as is her way  
surveys the scene comments  
on a broken window pane  
suggests a thing or two  
that every husband in the neighbourhood  
knows exactly how to do  
except of course the man she loves  
who happens to be me  
Unwilling to dispute  
the obvious fact  
that she is always right  
I turn towards the more  
attractive view that opens up  
behind my eyes and shuts her out  
Her voice crawls up and down the lawn  
our son who is seven  
hears it—and it reminds him of something  
He stands before us  
his small legs well apart  
crescent moon like chin uplifted

eyes hard and cold  
to speak his truth  
in masterly determination  
Mummy I want my dinner, now  
Wife and husband in unusual rapport  
share one unspoken thought  
Children Must Be Disciplined  
She looks at me I look away  
The son is waiting In another second  
he will repeat himself  
Wife wags a finger  
firmly delivers verdict Wait  
In five minutes I ll serve you dinner  
No says the little one  
not in five minutes now  
I am hungry  
It occurs to me the boy is like his father  
I love him as I love myself  
Wait darling wait  
Mummy says wait for five minutes  
But I am hungry now  
declaims the little bastard in five minutes  
I won t be hungry any more  
This argument appeals to me  
Such a logician deserves his dinner  
straightaway  
My wife s delightful laughter  
holds the three of us together  
We rise and go into the house

## KAMALA DAS

Born 1934

*Two volumes of verse in print Also many books of short stories and an autobiography in Malayalam Was awarded the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Prize in 1967 for Thanuppu Has written for Opinion The Illustrated Weekly of India Poetry East and West and other journals here and abroad A selection of her poems in English The Old Play House and Other Poems has just been published She is married with three children and lives in Bombay*

## Kamala Das

### Advice To Fellow-Swimmers

When you learn to swim  
do not enter a river that has no ocean  
to flow into one ignorant of destinations  
and knowing only the flowing as its destiny,  
like the weary rivers of the blood  
that bear the scum of ancient memories  
but go swim in the sea  
go swim in the great blue sea  
Where the first tide you meet is your body  
that familiar pest  
but if you learn to cross it  
you are safe yes beyond it you are safe  
For even sinking would make no difference  
then

## **Lines Addressed To A Devadasi**

Ultimately there comes a time  
When all faces look alike  
All voices sound similar  
And trees and lakes and mountains  
Appear to bear a common signature  
It is then that you walk past your friends  
And not recognise  
And hear their questions but pick  
No meaning out of words  
It is then that your desires cease  
And a homesickness begins  
And you sit on the temple steps  
A silent Devadasi lovelorn  
And aware of her destiny

## Cat In The Gutter

He said I am a red rag wherever I walk  
I am recognised I cannot so often come  
To sit at your bedside get well  
Come to my place again as you used to do  
He was yesterday's old rag today thrown  
On the garbage heap for such who would  
care ?

He need not have feared at all but  
Cowardice was his favourite diet  
So who would tell him that when he made  
love

Grunting groaning and sighing  
That with no soul to overpower me  
Only his robust limbs  
I was just a high bred kitten  
Rolling for fun in the gutter ,

## **Beauty Was A Short Season**

**Happiness**

**Yes**

**That was a moment or two**

**And beauty**

**A short season**

**For what hazy cause we outlive**

**Like gnarled fruit trees**

**The fecund season ?**

## The Fancy-Dress Show

Every virtue requires today  
A fancy dress the cassock is  
The priests main virtue the clever  
Politician dons a saint's mean  
Apparel The only ash is  
On the legitimate forehead  
And the holy water is in  
The right container Confessions  
Are mumbled regularly in the dark  
The patriots have survived their  
Long fasts the children of the poor  
Have not been so lucky we hear  
A pity The city morgues are  
Full of unclaimed cadavers yes  
God is in his heaven and all  
Is right with this stinking world



# The Morning At Apollo Pier

Welcome me lying down dear love  
And remain so  
I shall shut the window  
For upward floats the lepers tremolo

It is morning now at Apollo Pier  
There is a choppy sea and on the pavement  
Like sleek birds freed from cages  
beautiful men  
Inadequately loved walking  
To find a fatigue in their limbs

You ask me what I saw today I saw  
The cripple stump along hunger was bot  
His crutch and his limb I saw the jerk  
walk

Of the very young the baby's smile  
saw  
The beauty of the ageing male the f  
Blanched in cool rooms like flower  
bleached by rains

The haunches softened the steel in the h  
The knowledge in the eye

They tell me all my friends that I  
finished

That I can write no more they tell me

That the goose which laid the golden  
eggs can lay  
No more they tell me that your love is  
A morass where I must sink if not  
today  
Tomorrow But, hold me hold me  
once again  
Kiss the words to death in my mouth  
plunder  
Memories I hide my defeat in your  
Wearying blood and all my fears and  
shame  
You are the poem to end all poems  
A poem absolute as the tomb  
Your flawed beauty ■ my only refuge  
Oh love me love me until I die

## Middle Age

Middle age is when your children are no  
longer  
Friends but critics stern of face and severe  
with their tongue  
It's the time when like pupae they burst  
their cocoons and  
Emerge in harsh adult glory  
and they no longer  
Need you except for serving tea and for  
pressing  
Clothes but you need them all the same  
and badly too so  
That when left alone you touch their  
books and things and  
Weep a little secretly  
Middle age is when your son to whom  
you sent  
Once upon a time the squirrels invitation  
to their  
Jungle feast writing in golden ink and  
posting  
It at night turns round in disgust crying  
you have lived  
In a dream world all your life it's time to  
wake up Mother  
You are no longer so young you know

## Death Of The Goat

The only woman of the house was ill  
The one who used to run about at home  
Like a mad dervish busy with her chores  
The one whose hollow cheeks and  
spindly legs  
Made the children say oh mother you  
look  
So much like a goat!  
When they wheeled her into the hospital  
She opened wide her delirious eyes and  
said  
Please let me go  
I smell the Tur Dal burning

## **A Losing Battle**

How can my love hold him when the other  
Flaunts a gaudy lust and is lioness  
To his Beast? Men are worthless to  
trap them  
Use the cheapest bait of all but never  
Love which in a woman must mean tears  
And a silence in the blood

## **The Prisoner**

As the convict studies  
His prison's geography  
I study the trappings  
of your body dear love  
For I must some day find  
An escape from its snare

## **■ PARTHASARATHY**

**Born 1934**

*Educated at Bombay During 1963-64 British Council Scholar at Leeds University Is Regional Editor Oxford University Press Indian Branch Madras Poems yet to be collected have appeared in periodicals and anthologies including Encounter The Illustrated Weekly of India London Magazine Indian and Foreign Review Opinion Poetry India Quest A Review of English Literature The Times Literary Supplement Commonwealth Poems of Today (London 1967) Contemporary Indian Poetry in English (Bombay 1973) New Voices of the Commonwealth (London 1968) Pergamon Poets 9 Poetry from India and Young Commonwealth Poets 65 (London 1965) Was awarded the first Ulla Poetry Prize for 1966 sponsored by Poetry India He is married and lives in Madras*

# R Parthasarathy

## This Business

It doesn't make any sense  
to me either  
This business of poetry

Who the hell cares  
If an entire lifetime is burnt  
up in a page ?

They died young If Keats  
had never lived  
or an elephant crushed Bharati

the history of the race  
would be exactly the same  
I am often dissatisfied

with it—the only thing  
I can do reasonably well  
Yet I write

and reach after the dead  
by breaking  
this bread of poetry



## A Question Of Syntax

The wick of last year burnt out  
rain dripped like wax  
They met in a room with pictures

of Goan churches humped on the wall  
No meeting is ever a complete surprise  
the intimate talk comma of hand

on the waist and happiness  
in parenthesis are the usual syntax  
of the mind on these occasions

The conversation over black coffee  
was only pathetic . They looked for words  
with the knives and forks of silence

## The Trumpet Sun

Ears of earth  
are never deaf to the spiked song  
of the trumpet sun  
Time  
with wind and wave  
for fingers  
plays on four stops of seasons  
Plays  
loudest in summer  
after the low whistle of spring  
And the long ovation of leaves falling  
leaves the trumpet sun  
mute  
in the snow

## Tamil

My tongue in English chains  
I return after  
a generation to you

I am at the end  
of my Dravidic tether,  
hunger for you unassuaged

I falter stumble  
Speak in a tired language  
wrenched from its sleep

in the *Aural*  
teeth palate lips still new  
to its agglutinative touch

Now `hooked on celluloid  
you go reeling  
down plush corridors

## Looking Into A Mirror

Over a horizon of noises  
the clock strikes  
I rise as sleep melts  
on the Himalayas

of bedclothes And face  
the mirror in the bath  
True friend only you  
tell no lies Now that

all the silver  
at the back of faces  
I have loved has worn off  
You have me under lock

and key for good  
I am silent  
Eyes saccadic I stare  
at myself Often

confront a stranger  
in the scratched glass  
older perhaps  
who resembles my father

## Rough Passage

Mortal as I am I face  
the end with unspeakable  
relief knowing  
how I should feel  
if I were stopped and cut off

Were I to clutch at the air  
straw in my extremity  
how should I not scream  
I haven't finished ?  
Yet that too would pass unheeded

Love I haven't the key  
to unlock His gates  
Night curves I grasp your hand  
in a rainbow of touch Of the dead  
I speak nothing but good

## Touch

*You have trusted your life to a single  
hair don't struggle or you will  
break it*

CESARE PAVESE *Il Mestiere di Vivere*

### I

The body sputters : your flesh  
was the glass  
that cupped its hands over me

Hours glowed  
to incandescence : An uneasy  
world swarmed around us

Now only the thought of you  
(five coals I blow on)  
burns distance to a stub

### II

Observe the town in a haze  
Under the heavy lens of noon  
passion quicker

Than candles burn  
smoking the glass of their bodies  
The haze lifts

Evening disfigures  
vision stones of the day  
turn phantoms

But in the dark  
hands and lips  
have marked the spot they touched

Still as crockery these two  
rinsed and dried  
after half a day's legitimate use

### III

I am all fingers when it comes  
to touching them Their fullness  
keeps the eyes peeled

with excitement A nipple hardens  
on the tongue Here  
pleasure is elliptic wholesome

### IV

Tonight I breathe on your skin  
it clouds over  
Soon it will reflect nothing

(my limp tongue thickened  
in your furrow

delicately sniffs at odours  
from seasoned flesh)  
inexpugnable sometimes

sleeved in a childhood  
I cannot overtake O night  
darker than ever in our arms

V

It is night alone helps  
to achieve a lucid exclusiveness  
Time that had dimmed

your singular form  
by its harsh light now makes  
recognition possible

through this opaque lens  
Touch brings the body into focus  
restores colour to inert hands

till the skin takes over  
erasing angularities and the four walls  
turn on a strand of hair



## K. N. DARUWALLA

Born 1937

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# K N Daruwalla

## Black Rain

I cannot cry like you  
shoulders hunched into a knot of pain  
and the face breaking into a thousand  
pieces

I must stand erect my eyes  
spaceless and open too much blinking  
against the cold wind and they may think  
I am holding back tears

I must live with my grief  
as a stone breaker lives with his vocation  
must feed them on the thirteenth day of  
plantain leaves  
go to office with a shaved head  
hang my coat on a peg and pretend  
that nothing has happened

The roles are reversed in a way  
not exactly for that would look stag  
managed  
but others are crying around you today  
As live ash sizzles on the cold river  
like a dying passion  
it takes all the strength in me

to restrain a shiver

And yet with all the cold despair around  
this sterile moment oozing thin black rain

I envy you the quiver

with which your tears came

and your relief

As for me grey hair roots

sprouting from the scalp next week

may be my only catharsis

## Easy And Difficult Animals

(To Khurshid)

You have no problems such as mine  
you do not cower  
from your own thoughts  
                  it doesn't frighten you  
the iron edge awaking from its rust  
the crawl of oxidized dreams  
                  in lonely hours

Where do you get your insights from  
and your simple words ?  
teaching our daughter that day you said  
                  some dreams are animals  
                  some dreams are birds

The moonface was either  
                  turned towards light  
                  or away from it  
dark fruit / incandescent fruit  
Your distinctions were a knife  
that went cutting to the root  
You divided in two  
this animal delirium that we call life  
into easy animals / difficult animals  
All that moved on legs  
                  flew on wings  
                  crawled on the belly

inhaled through fins  
hedgehog and weasel and polecat  
all that went to the taxidermist  
gizzard and buzzard and bat  
you lumped together as easy animals  
and pitched against this menagerie  
one solitary cry  
that one difficult animal  
that was I

## Death Of A Bird

Under an overhang of crags  
fierce bird love  
the monals mated clawed and screamed  
the female brown and nondescript  
the male was a king a fire dream!  
My barrel spoke one word of lead  
the bird came down the king was dead

or almost dying  
his eyes were glazed the breast still  
throbbed.  
We tucked him pulsing as he was in our  
rucksack.  
The female rose in terror crying '  
With bird blood on our hands we walked  
and as the skies broke into rags  
of mist why did our footsteps drag ?

The cumulus piled on the crags  
We smote the pony on its shanks  
to hurry him around a bend  
he swivelled and went down the flank  
of rock a thousand feet below  
to where the roaring river flowed

His scream  
climbed up the gorge a nightmare fang

which ploughed my blistered dreams and  
sowed

begging children

Depressed a bit we took the road  
walking like ciphers disinterred  
from some forgotten code

Dusk caught up with us and bears  
my terror gun spat at the shades  
but missed each time  
When jackals howled sniffing ribs  
trembling she asked if they were wolves?  
I simply held her hand in mine

and walked on further to a cave  
hemmed in by pine

we would have missed  
but for a growling bhotia dog  
the resin tappers left behind  
to guard their cans and beaded ichor  
pimpling like a spray of cysts  
Just yards off an escarpment wrote  
hieroglyphs on a scroll of mist  
And as she crumpled with a chill  
I lit fire of turf and peat  
and rubbed her clotted sides and feet  
and found her waking in my hands  
(this shadow pair of quickening hands)  
like embers in a shadow net  
In the wet lanes of her body  
we apprehensive met

And as we rose to the final kill  
—two electric saws meeting on a hill

in the marrowing bones of a fractured  
tree—  
each of us thought the other was free  
of the pony's scream and the monal's  
wings  
and the prowling bears in the firelight rim

Her head on my heartbeat hair locked in  
my fingers  
she purred into sleep the night seemed  
to flower

late with our dreams  
for the moon came out just for an hour  
or two  
and the monal wings came feathering down  
in a passion of dusky gold and blue  
And the wolves with the mist went  
over the cliff  
—but for the wind we both would have  
dreamt  
the very same dream of quiescence and  
love  
but the wind was a thorn in the flesh  
of the night  
and moaned aloud like a watch in the  
flue

I broke my gun in two across the back  
of an ash grey dawn A brown bird left  
the crags  
flying strongly and as its shadow crossed  
us  
it shrieked with fear and turned to stone



He had mastered the bull within him  
and the bull without  
nonchalant he could turn his back  
on incensed horns  
he had withdrawn  
from ■ faithless girl  
halfway through an intercourse  
—just to show his control

Ah! the banderillero  
extrovert as skin  
handsome as the sun !

Toro hah hah and as the bull charges  
the crowd is a mass hysteria  
for no one had seen this before  
so elegantly surely dangerously  
he placed the banderillas  
so elegantly surely dangerously  
he placed the cortas!  
Till once at five in the afternoon  
as he treaded the bullring  
(no one had known  
he was constipated that day)  
an unfinished bull  
bristling with banderillas  
finished him an hour  
after five in the afternoon  
(the legends were many  
he had waved to his girlfriend at the  
moment of truth  
slipped on a banana peel  
the bull was cock eyed double visioned

and had turned the wrong way  
into the wrong vision)

I wail for him  
king of a hundred wives  
lord of two hundred thighs  
(His kingdom was so big  
it extended to half his harem)  
You only had to clang a bell  
and if he wasn't drunk  
or whoring or sleeping  
he doled out instant justice  
When the battle rolled over to his door  
he doused his elephant with drink  
and getting hold of a spear charged  
(the spear was the only  
sober thing on the elephant)  
No wonder the enemy ran  
He won every battle  
except the last—against syphilis

I wail for the espionaut  
the gold fingered Bond  
the lone wolf pitched  
against international combines  
He has eyes that outdistance telescopes  
biceps that outmuscle iron  
few beds can stand  
the rigours of his virility  
Enormous the scientific  
and sexual gadgetry at his command  
But aren't we getting stale with all this

the stance and the maleness both out of  
date?

I wait  
for this  
stupid  
romanticised  
non existant male

## Aag-Matam

(The Fire mourning)

*Alams* held aloft the procession comes  
(a thought blisters along the arid skull  
so also shoulder high the Imam's enemies  
carried his severed head spiked to a spear)  
*Alams* held aloft green sluiced with stained topaz  
—the green which the arab soul hungers for  
spiced with the brown realities of the desert—  
the procession emerges from the Imambara

The fire bed is fanned with ■ reed mat  
and sparks fly as if wind had scattered  
a concourse of glow worms Calling on his name  
and the grief that was his and the iron claw  
of fate

that marked him for its quarry  
they stamp barefoot across the fire stubble  
Even children tread the star clay of this patch  
cinder and fire ash rising to their knees  
as the amplifiers urge them on Lovers of the  
Imam

moths to the flame of Husain come!

Their thirst is a desert as they take the firewalk  
their eyes are already on Karbala and  
heads that rolled and the babe Ali Ashar  
Duldul the faithful horse frothing the sword  
in Husain's uplifted hand like a scythe  
and waiting for him the harvest of spears!

## 6th Moharram, 1393

Between the Imambara and the Rumi Gate  
traffic has clotted like an epileptic tongue  
the mourners neither press forward nor recede  
their torsos swaying over rooted legs  
like the upper reaches of a windlashed tree  
Behind the veil a woman murmurs to her child  
the spreading weal across their chest recalls  
the omen red of the Karbala sun

Someone quotes the mother of the Imam  
as she bemoaned the lightning burns of fate

Such are the hardships  
that have swooped on me that if  
they fell upon the days  
they would have turned to nights!  
The breast beating thuds away as the  
lament rises ' Hai Husain ! Husain ! Husain !  
This mourning isn't ritual it is personal  
this heritage of grief passed by father to son  
thus rose bleeding endless through the desert  
of time

Before passion such as this  
you can only offer humility !  
They have awaited moharram  
like a tree aching for leaf !

They long for him to walk  
the firebed of their dreams '   
And even as the body shrivels like a fig  
they wet their lips with your name Husain '

# Haranaag

I

The bamboo jungle grew around our house  
an arthritic forest  
of tangled bone  
spiked with leaf

You couldn't cut it  
the stems had hardened so  
The chopped limbs could not be moved  
they were interlaced like bone shards  
in a multiple fracture  
You couldn't burn it after the rains  
—it was too green  
and if you burnt it in June  
half the town would go cindering with it

and so the jungle stayed  
and in its shadow  
the porcupine and the bamboo viper

II

We all have our superstitions  
mine are snakes ,  
no instinct fear  
of flashing eye and coil

nor is my past  
mined with lariat traumas  
of the umbilical cord  
but a fear almost rational  
for after each serpent dawn  
disaster struck  
news of sickness news of death  
and near at home once after he appeared  
■ dehydrating baby  
inching towards delirium

Then on the fifth night of *Shiravan*  
(when *Garur* the eagle god  
is said to sweat with fear)  
and we like others  
had made a *Sheshnag*  
from lashed blades of straw  
and offered it milk in an earthen bowl  
and grain the hind legs  
of our dog *Tiger*  
froze paralytic  
His lungs strained and heaved  
like a pair of bellows—broke  
Pointing out the purple tongue  
the Vet who only a minute ago  
had treated him for colic said  
Sure as death, he died of snake bite

///

Nor gravel on the driveway  
nor carbolic acid



kept him from the house  
Twice he appeared  
in the bathroom facing the jungle  
and each time she ran screaming  
Haranag ' Haranag '

I kept my stick  
in the bathroom now

One day as she undressed  
turning her head she of a sudden saw  
him luminous with deathly fires  
green of body and golden irised  
eyeing her intently as a rapist  
In naked terror she screamed  
(Later she did not remember  
if it hissed whether its eyes  
were elliptical or round  
All that remained with her  
were thirst impressions  
and a feel of oil)

This time I reached him in time  
no sin fear could keep my arm away  
(I was particularly angry  
that she was naked)  
The stick came down in repetitive rage  
on a shimmering dance of coils  
and his innards lay scatter gunned on the  
floor

When I reached her she shook  
like a vibrating leaf

At night she said ' We must make amends  
and offer milk and grain again  
I agreed and started pouring  
a most pungent eye-drop  
and found her eye ball scuttling north  
into the forest of the upraised lid  
leaving behind a white-desert-eye  
and again I found her trembling  
like a trapped bird  
facing the serpent hood

# The Epileptic

## I

Suddenly the two children  
flew from her side  
like severed wings

Thank God the burden in her belly  
stayed where it was

The rickshaw puller was a study in guilt  
it was too much for him  
the convulsionary and her frightened kids  
floundering about in a swarm of limbs

A focus in the brain  
or some such flap  
the look had gone from the mother's eyes  
the way her children  
had flown from her lap

The husband dug through the mound  
that was her face forced the mouth wide  
plucked out the receding tongue  
warped into a clotted wound  
and put a gag between her teeth



## At Bansa

His hand came up to his tartar beard  
in archaic salute  
Take her to the mosque at Bansa he said  
on the night preceding  
the first friday of the month  
Inshallah ! She shall be cured

and so to Bansa  
on the night when the moon  
was an elhpse

Suddenly you find  
that everybody is here  
thin scrawny girls  
carved out of a single thigh  
hysteric quail like brides  
banging their foreheads on the floor  
and loose fleshed women  
with foetus and a demon  
in their ballooned bellies

It was a village like any other village  
mustard fields incised by dirt tracks  
tumorous outgrowths of mud and wattle  
and here and there a patch of stonework  
—beginnings in a new atrophy  
Around one mud house

white chalk prints of a palm  
—Khamza the protecting hand of  
Fatima—  
ran all along the wall

The hawkers sell a pulp of gram  
steaming poisonously spiced  
Lost among them is a face  
where age and grime have dug themselves  
His wares are papers where thick black  
ink  
in thick black squares interrelates  
the 28 arab alphabets  
with 28 houses of the moon

You've got me wrong  
It is not an esoteric carnival  
—gnostic papyri and pentacle  
subtle divination and brute exorcism  
with a hundred frenzies  
cavorting round the mosque

only the ritual mascara  
which is pencilled on each eye  
is talismanic

Otherwise

it is a *ma ar* like all *ma ars*  
you receive the *tabaruk* on bended knees  
you kiss the stone and make a secret wish  
releasing it like a partridge  
from your inner pocket

A filigreed chandelier  
sheds its lambence on the grave  
The *Mujawirs* that lie in wait  
are vultures/quacks/ simpletons  
a few are even genuine  
—echoes of an ancient ululation

Wrapped in a green takmat he comes  
this black bearded silhouette  
bare feet approaching with  
*padded animal softness*  
In low melodic murmurs he intones  
*suras* from the Quran  
—kindled arabesques  
that unwind from his mouth  
like a thread of light  
With a black finger end he smears  
mascara on her eyelash  
Daughter! your troubles are at an  
end !

## K D LATRAK

Born 1936

*Managing Director of an advertising agency Two books of verse in print has written for Opinion Quest Poetry India The Illustrated Weekly of India Has won many awards for advertising including Advertising Club Award Air India Trophy Commercial Artists Guild Award He is married has one child and lives in Bombay*



# K D Katrak

## Poems From An Immurement

### *I*

#### The Descent

Fascism is the opiate of the Elite  
Illness is the refuge of Magicians  
These are facts though you will not hear of  
    them from me  
Wild horses will not extract my teeth  
My lips are sealed by awful oaths  
of secrecy and furtive kisses

All polarities all hoary dialectics  
Rites of passage from Thing to Opposite  
Gather at the threshold of the thirty seventh  
Birth anniversary of the blessed and most  
    venerable  
Kersasp

Forwards my hearties      Or at least  
    backwards

A last philosophizing before they stick the salt  
drip

Into my crotch This is the result  
Of years of joyful constipation  
Gathering light to oneself living off  
People's blood shining like a tarnished sun  
And labelling the buffoon Kersy

Methinks the Bhukshu doth protest too much

Do you feel it lad a loosening of bowels  
An earthquake Hear the rumble?  
End of world

Eee you bastard take your injection away  
No no no take your big fat lobotomy away  
I am not Ezra Pound

Tell yonder ghost in the corner to leave  
It offendeth mine eyeballs avast ye ghoul

And tell finally Usha to keep her fingers crooked  
And her legs I shall return  
Meanwhile  
Me erectile muscles is ruined  
Bank balance leaks I hear  
Me good friend N— is a mess

Forwards lads!

Aah He's coming He's coming  
He's going to save the world

Lazarus come forth  
Sorry luv my name is Legion

## The Conspiracy

Cannot help feeling the texture of science  
 fiction  
 Though no bug eyed monsters here  
 Nor interstellar rape nor intelligent cloud  
 forms from Andromeda  
 Invasion of intergalactic spores nor curva-  
 tures of hyperspace  
 Though that angle in wall is odd reflections  
 of light  
 From porcelain basin marginally incorrect and  
 the hollow  
 Of my palm not the right shape

Wilt not leave me alone ? Friends  
 With current gossip letters addressed to a name  
 Unmistakably mine flowers for me  
 My medicines arriving on the dot injections in  
 my buttock  
 Urine specimens that claim me  
 Bacterial cultures cardiograms telegrams  
 Screaming Kersy A hundred penumbrae  
 Insistent on my identity ?

My mother each morning fills the room  
With a brave earnest smile : provides the rest,  
Habit years of training  
Keep your head pull yourself together  
Whose head love ? Who pulls whom ?  
Managing Director pull Parsee together ?  
Parsee keep Husband intact ?  
Husband preserve Responsible Adult for  
posterity ?

High fever says Dr Baria does that you know  
Hallucinations a marginal loss of identity  
amnesia  
Sometimes I think of Kiran between two gasps  
Thirty seconds away dying from asthma and  
steroids  
Holding on I would like to let go  
If you would clear this room  
If I m not outfoxed by residual instinct  
Of lymph and nerve and heartbeat I plan to  
spit out my pill  
Tonight I plan to do it rather  
Not do it wait for the Universe to show Itself  
or no  
As it wills plan to be still not waiting  
For the turn of any tide

# The Beatific Vision

What think you ? This frenzy to record  
 Seize pen in fingers weakened by leaking  
     anus  
 Give permanence to personal trivia tape  
     laughter  
 Video recurring nightmare make home  
     movies of erotica  
 Slow motion cardiograms of the Vision  
     is it good ?  
 Isn't even pardonable ? Is Truth here ?  
     Nobility ?  
 Are motives tolerable ? Audience captive ?  
 Has't learnt to put up with me like old  
     wife  
 Predictable at tea ? Nevertheless  
 Onwards !  
 Forward the Arts !  
 Brave flag of Spirit  
 Wave over my shrine at Iwo Jima !

I have seen Him

It is most bitter you understand to see  
     desperation

That drove Zen Monk Greek Patriarch  
And Anchonte to say it  
What ?  
Something  
Write book  
Leave pronouncement  
If nothing an inarticulate cry  
A grunt  
Somehow blaze tree  
Arrange pebbles just so in sand to shriek  
This is so I affirm it

But for me how ?  
Give personal background ?  
Swollen prostate infected bladder  
Pain pushed so far that it turns to a fine  
Caviar in the blood ?

What then ? Same old lies ?  
Same old Truth ?  
That the Whole blazes unity limit to limit  
From the Halls of Montezuma to the Sands  
of Tripoli ?  
As Above so Below ?  
Jesus Lives ?  
Love Conquers All ?  
Even finest spiderweb of Zen toucheth It not  
No grasping Non-effort The Non attain  
ment  
All fall down  
Old man Void swallows all

I have seen Him  
But return (alas?) unchanged

Go on urge me on  
Send me fan mail  
Fill in responses  
Answer questionnaires  
Send me roses  
That I may change my nature  
Send me telegrams  
So the world may be saved

Burn paper destroy tape Do not cling  
nor turn away mine audience

It is here It is everyday mund  
Not withdrawn It is world seen with corporeal  
eye  
Where wives are wives whores whores  
Lawsuits lawsuits  
After affirmations forgotten poets silenced  
Mystics dead It is here Like grilled steak  
for lunch  
Bank cheques bouncing dull patch of hospital  
wall old gumboots

O most Holy O Love of the World  
It shines

## Three Explorations Into The Nature Of The Female Beast

1

## Persephone In The Heavens At Midnight

Whatever your mortal fears of the night  
Rational distaste for the dark eye of thieves  
                                subdued hysteria  
At the diurnal half in shadow if you shudder  
                                at menstrual rage  
Casually discarded at your doorstep worry  
                                over the disturbances of pets  
Suddenly observe your husband as homicidal  
            stranger mistake your bedroom window  
For more than an opening in walls if your feet  
                                stuck  
In the effluvium of dreams lay these all at Her  
                                doorstep  
Who eats you alive with your unknowing consent  
But identify Her Whether you observe that  
                                white lava face  
Backwards through a home made telescope  
                                whether you see  
A thin Greek virgin scattered on Pluto's iron  
                                phallus



Or more simply a young woman who in twenty  
eight  
Houses will grow to the hag who haunts each  
village crossroads  
Pay your tribute leave at Her feet from time to  
time

A flower or two as surrogate sacrifice  
Or hungry as always She will take half your  
liver

And supposing you believe this not discard  
my rag tag  
Sibilances supposing your walls are thick your  
bank balance  
In order your car overhauled your food sensible  
and low in fats  
Are you then safe ? Constrain Her apparitions  
She will become Desire turning sour in your  
erotum  
Debar Her from your room She will enter your  
bloodstream  
Dilute your carotid with strange esters with  
ergot and henbane  
Control Her lunacy and She will make you  
Inquisitor  
Refuse Her offer to become a tramp and you  
will werewolf instead  
Into compulsive poet Retreat to hair shirt and  
cave

Her pull extends to Middle Earth hidden winds  
Rains of blood subterranean snow fall of frogs  
By night She frets in your sheets By day  
Pale in the hidden hemisphere She commands  
the stimulants  
In your morning tea

How then puppy friend adman husband  
householder  
What escape for your quivering holiness?  
Serfdom is your all Bend your knee call  
Her lady liege  
Pay Her court send Her a personal invitation  
to visit  
Pronounce Her wife and go in the arms of per  
sonal love  
Beware Her impersonal mills Her scattered  
Whirling resonances Wherever you walk  
She will measure your shadow  
Take clay impressions of your footprint as dolls  
for needles  
Her rotundum bears you Her strings puppet  
your limbs  
Yet will She let you live if you love Her in  
Love's first hole  
Or else without a word pack you away by accident  
By strangulation or drowning without a mys  
terium to offer you clues  
With causes as physical as Her tides

# Madonna On The Beach At Sunset

Do not be taken in

Let not memory of you mother's lap  
Nostalgic prancing on a sister's knee love of  
your wife's mouth

Becloud what remains of reason

As you watch Her sit amidst oceanic grapes and  
olives

The crescent moon chained to Her mundane  
slippers

Her mantle of stars beginning to glow

As our Father Sun slips to his perihelion under  
water

Butchered as usual sent to his burial station

In underbelly of octopus and squid

Her smile broadens as the night advances

Half sad half benign exploration of Her son

Changes to a grin as She scatters His underclothes,

Her new moon's mincing virginity shows

The coarseness underneath as the Houses change

From Fool to Hanged Man to the final terrific

Hag's pieta

O She pities you as She eats



Or potions disguised as chocolate creams  
If by excess of gin or by simple love of you  
She slips between your sheets She will take you  
Beyond your planetary margins  
Beyond blood stream and bile beyond horos  
copy or meditative prowess  
If you keep your lover's meeting in the well  
of the Heart  
If you kiss Her at the mouth of Love's first  
cave

### III

#### Durga On A Hilltop At Noon

Admire if you can while your gorge rises and  
writhes  
Into a medusa of deadly acids the passionless  
justice of the Face  
Scales equipoised in the Sun's corona at dead  
midpoint  
Of the day's solstice while the bull buffalo calf  
Staggers in Bahdan the carotid severed spasms  
carnivorous carrot juice  
And a river runs like placid amrita from Feet  
Whose sacred signs flowers and coconuts  
Make inviolate against your secret loathing  
Her forked passion for Blood ! Nor must you  
mistake  
That passion as poisonous or furtive no covert  
lusts here

But a divine calling forth a crystalline opening  
of arteries  
Her eyes untroubled challenge your house  
holders walls  
Her attendant demons clearly visible are your  
daylight ghosts

Better you dare the vertigo of the flat ravine  
beneath  
Than look too long at the crest of that hill  
More than vultures will gather there  
Better you busy yourself with lungfulls of nico  
tine  
This too is Her domain in the Kingdom of  
Plants  
She nurtures hemp and henbane poppy and  
grape  
Visit Her back garden seed of datura petal  
of deadly nightshade  
The giant Belladonna in Her kitchen Her  
children distil  
Hyoscine and Ergot liqueurs of morning Glory  
Thus thus She keeps you asleep fattens you  
for slaughter  
With pollen wafted to your bedroom  
From mushroom and cactus soothes the nerve  
in your vagus  
Deadens your adrenaline softens flow of blood  
to brain cell  
Sucks the marrow from your spine lets you  
awake  
Only in the arms of lust only five days a year  
When she needs your erection

Those villagers whose dholak and mantra  
Vivify the signal air understand this not  
Only they feel a great voiding of the bladder  
A clearing of sperm a lightening of blood stream  
As the bull calf quivers In the summer heat  
Rain will fall spines will straighten  
Wheat grow tall barren daughters  
No longer sinister their smile From time to time  
This yokel will repeat  
His mini sacrifice slaughter a cucumber  
Smash coconut slice pumpkin retch out his guts  
In a piety of oblation to his niche in the wall  
To buy peace She cheats him  
As She cheats you all

As for you my only not disbelieving  
Wideawake reader who asks What then?  
I offer these obscure instructions  
Build no clay images offer no libidinous goats  
Nor hairy bullocks for sacrifice  
Take to a darkened room and build in your  
imagination  
Her image till it glows with light  
Solidifies before retina exudes Her special smell  
To reach your physical nose  
Do not reach out and touch her not  
However vivid Her mare's mouth  
Keep your snake under cloth your bird in a  
cage  
Your sword awake as your will by your side  
Then stiffening your spine Shiva  
Offer Her your length of iron  
To bruise the Mount of Her sanctity

Withholding it till She reduces to Her special  
lunacy  
To moans and begging  
State your conditions firmly  
If She accepts throw away your cards  
Each major trump hold return Her surrogate  
gifts  
And promises and offer Her only love

Then if the time of night is right and the verity  
Of your constellations tested in the Heavens  
Trust Her hand as it kills She no longer  
Beast nor Bitch nor Goddess but simply Woman  
Your beloved in the Kingdom of Flesh  
Trust Her as She leads  
Through the hollow domains of your spine  
Through secret navels opening to temples  
Domes under hidden starlight arise King  
Enter the place of thronehood  
By candlelight by mothlight by the hooded  
incandescence of glow worms  
Guided by Her strange soft furry beasts  
To the Feet of Love



## Three Poems From The Book Of Divination

### I

#### The Ghost In The Rice Fields

Thus then will be your strangeness your  
uncommon lot  
If you have grown a tropical hybrid  
Running brown and naked under a solar logos  
in this dense  
Undergrowth of subcontinent confused by a  
flash  
Of cyan plumage monsoon foliage parrots  
beaks  
Thus will be your birthright of Anglican gloom  
Bartered for a mess of Vedic pottage head full of  
Shakespeare  
And Kant palate bridled to Cognac eyes  
lifted to distant Christs  
In a pale sanctuary at Rheims with the Indian  
wilderness  
Thirty miles from your unsafe doorstep No  
civilized  
Durga here even no hierarchy of benign Vishnus  
But red stones worshipped on hill tops as the  
Mother Goddess

Goats slaughtered to Bhutas children  
strangled  
By a Hindu vampire  
Then when your supersubstantial bread arrives  
You will find it divided torn by strange goats  
paws  
In a parody of Easter Your ghosts when they  
appear  
Under a full moon in Baisakh will bring no  
reassurance  
Of trellis and transom no safe habitation  
In winecellar and attic no heraldic abbots will  
produce  
A safe and fairytale tingle up your spine no  
phantom coaches  
Curdle your romantic stomach No my friend  
These things were clogs and can be heard a mile  
away at dusk  
These larvae if you meet them  
Under dead tree trunks wear the face of lions  
A lions mane an aura a tribal stench  
The dead here speak a gabble two centuries old  
A queer village Marathi to disturb your dreams  
By the wash of the Arabian sea

From outside my window two furlongs away  
in the rice fields  
Thus hag intruded on my sleep for seven nights  
No apparitions no psychic signs no gooseflesh  
Only a strange hoarse obscene cursing  
A monotone sustained for hours  
Not hate as you understand<sup>v</sup> it not an  
emotion

But heavy and damp in the palpable air  
Like physical blows    Finally desperate I hoisted  
                 my hurricane  
And went out to face her    Nothing to see  
Only paddy stalks in the thin night breeze  
And this continuous howling    She was begging  
                 for alms  
What will you do with money old woman I said  
The dead cannot spend    Not money leave  
                 me meat  
Raw meat by your doorstep I am hungry  
Leave me food or I will take your children  
Bugger off I said I go back to Bombay to  
                 morrow  
Visit me there if you can live in the air of cities  
Enter by the grille of my air conditioner we  
                 will deal with you there  
The next morning at the head of my bed  
Impressed on a hard red cement floor was a  
                 single  
Perfect footprint

Are these ancient stories of astral vertigo  
Veridic then ?

Stigmata produced by epileptics  
Hysteric signatures impressed on the sacra-  
                 mental host ?

Is a man's lunacy prefigured not only in the stars  
In atmospheres and auras  
But in some way heavy and physical  
Substantial as slap or scar ?

## The Intrusion Of Miracles

Plainly I tell you Doctor Freud  
 Fragment of my hallucinated present helpless  
     member of my audience  
 My judge in posterity God or Witness in my  
     Here and Now  
 You my somnambulist guide of most awake and  
     critical  
 But perfectly imaginary biographer remain  
     unpanicked  
 By your own organic lunacy strange functioning  
     of tissues  
 Revolutions of cell perturbations of bone  
     marrow  
 Convulsions in hair root and tooth enamel  
     glandular  
 Cataclysm cloudbursts of sweat tremeluria  
 Hypoglycaemic upheavals flutters in the dia  
     stole  
 Breathing gone to tatters and ominous red lights  
 Foreshadowing palsy or paralytic stroke  
 Overcome finally the vertigo of your soul at loss  
     of body  
 And you will push into a strange be ause  
     unfamiliar

### III

#### The Book Of Changes As Interpreted In The Changing Lines On Usha's Brow

Thrust cloven foot first into this world  
Under a huddle of stars in Capricorn    Sirius  
    my paternal Uncle  
Orion's belt a lifeline into exile    my mother's  
    ears freezing  
In the cold of a preternatural January humped  
    Parsee  
Grandparents fuddling with private anxieties  
    will he be fair  
Will his nose be straight and Aryan    under such  
    petty constellations  
This damp and umbrous planet received a foot  
    and a half  
Of pink infant and a bulbous head

Monkey face    they chuckled    Overhead  
The Larger Bear froze the fabled Unicorn the  
    dewlapped Bull  
Red Antares like some bearded Immortal  
In sextile whispered    Vanity will be his  
    monkey  
He will wear a Persian beard    Canopus sinistered  
And shushed on the horizon    His dreams will be  
    troubled

By avarice he will covet sports cars    Bandy legs  
    said Procyon  
His dog's head at the Ascendant    A glut of  
    remorse  
Stored in the liver and a weakness for nicotine  
Underground in the hidden hemisphere the Crux  
    Australis  
Poetry and a crust of metaphysical magma  
    Lava beds of psychosis  
A fatal preoccupation with Freud    In the ninth  
    house  
Ganymede minor moon of Jupiter Write  
    him off  
Cowardice will kill him by forty

Now prematurely forty I accept this death  
And turn it to my advantage    Now  
    flatly I disown my past  
All you Archons    all melodious    Angelic  
    Orders  
Gandharvas and Goatheads  
Elohim and Elephants  
Thrones and Dominions and Principalities  
    I request you forthwith  
To leave    Now shamelessly I return your  
    covert bribes  
Smuggle back to their source in the Empyrean  
Old cognac unbridled greed anxiety and  
    aphrodisiacs  
Pipe tobaccos cured in honey    gluttony  
Sloth, gullibility and dual carburettion  
Air conditioning and the odours of unused sex

That fester in my armpit give back to those  
ancient bearded con men  
In their planetary houses the unspoken  
diseases of tomorrow

Do not smile you tubs of heavenly lard  
against your occult gravity  
In opposition square and trine  
I posit my humpty dumpty wife Now  
my piracy  
Is suckled by her secret greed my anxiety  
Focussed in her sciatic nerve If she lies  
abed  
I am lazy If she smiles I indulge the giggle  
of my boyhood  
I am safe

For here too in the feet I hold are hidden  
spirals  
Nebulae under skin zodiacal beasts  
divinatory  
Underbellies of crabs and eagles Here  
too secret myths of light revolve  
A minor scar on the thigh incites revo-  
lution  
A seizure of muscle changes my orbit  
the length of her hair  
Affects my lifeline her upheavals of sex  
Foreshadow the health of my liver In  
denying one fate  
I am seized by another Here too my  
sextant points awry, my astrolabe

in black hearts, in  
meat of flesh,  
and blood that flows  
to cities,  
and, the air heightened  
in back garden, now

from Cannas in markets

in the front door of the

andles  
withering in time's bow  
leaden my erection

in white cell  
cooing doves  
unquickened by the sun  
rich deadens my erection

through the official entrance  
monastery  
starving Buddhas  
meditating in the half dark  
yful constipation ruined  
tion

send it takes too long this  
sides

ended come with me  
II Under  
Come Gods



## The Kitchen Door

And Ramakrishna said It is possible

Yes it

is possible by the use of the Tantric  
method

to attain to Illumination Even sex used  
with dedication leads to the goal But  
why should you choose to enter by the  
kitchen door when the front door  
is available?

Why that even

I have often pondered good simple saint  
Mother ridden Mahatma with mouth agape

In Holy awe at Kali's gobs

Offered to suck Is any man's beloved

Less sacred than your black image

Flesh less to be desired than anthracite

Any flea ridden tool less worthy

Of veneration than the caste mark on your  
forehead?

That kitchen door you speak of has taken me  
Half a lifetime to find and behind

Is such a sap and savour that official  
entrants

And other gentlemen forfeit alive

In the white dusk of their souls secrets  
hidden

Low fires burning on black hearths smells  
Goings on the cooking of flesh  
Slaughtered black rams blood that flows  
under secret cities  
Tastes of the only fruit the air heightened  
With herbs from the back garden cow  
dung  
Gentian and spices from Caucasian markets

I have been through the front door of the  
church  
Altars and lilies candles  
Chastened saints withering in time's bower  
Gilt and incense deaden my erection

I have been in the white cell  
Tiled floors and cooing doves  
Breviary and icon unquickenened by the sun  
The hermit's stench deadens my erection

I have been through the official entrance  
to the monastery  
Low horns and starving Buddhas  
Ramrod monks meditating in the half dark  
The abbot's joyful constipation ruined  
my erection

No no my friend it takes too long this  
way besides  
The other is more enlivened come with me  
And I will show you as I found it Under  
Norton's Hotel at Ranikhet Come God's  
fool

Flap eared ass-bottomed come through  
the rose garden  
And the kitchen door See here the  
Alchemist  
And his small fair wife Be their drudge  
Serve them and sleep on straw  
And at the mid hour of night that other  
door will open  
After seven years your Rachel  
Come to claim her unearthly sweets  
Of flesh  
  
Enter my friend enter

## GAURI DESHPANDE

Born 1942

*Educated in Poona taught English for some time in the Fergusson College and the Poona University. Three books of poems Between Births Lost Love and Beyond the Slaughterhouse. At present editing Opinion Literary Quarterly with A D Katre and writing a biography of Gopal Arushna Gokhale. Also writes in Marathi and translates from it into English. She has two children and lives in Bombay.*

# Gauri Deshpande

## Elegy For A Friend

Oh my country butchered blattened  
and bludgeoned into flat  
apathy consider this drouth  
It will not kill you  
Just enough sustenance to keep  
you suffering will come from the heaps  
in the world's coffers  
sufficient sympathy will encourage  
begging A few glittering gifts  
couple of friendly words will prolong  
your foetid leprous bag of bones life  
till the next rain which will fail  
again and again—  
Even death is not your ally  
Better resume diplomatic relations  
so he will send a scourge  
a fire deluge a final weapon  
in your warfare with fate  
It is the only aid that'll avail

## Laying Of Ghosts

It would seem inevitable yes  
that out of love I should bear your  
children at least the one  
that is expected the sun  
to destroy ancestral darkness of nether  
worlds

It is reasonable  
But what of those I rejected  
those that are dead  
those accidental sowings cleaned out  
in minutes without pain ?  
Where was the love and the hate  
and where generations of hungry ghosts  
demanding their spirits food ?  
An economic decision a legal social  
or medical one  
that denied my body to all but self and  
such  
liberated convictions came to my aid  
that without a twinge it was done  
That was reasonable

And yet I stumble over answers—  
one or two or three or more ?—  
What do I say usually with a wry grimace  
One for all practical purposes  
and yet did I not fulfil those

with them all ? The born unborn  
dead ?

Since they were all borne  
without any reference to love  
it ■ reasonable

that one whatever and however in  
defiance

of reason should be born  
of that moment when seeing me wake  
you smile  
for that reason only





not medicine not gods and ancestors None  
Only your total humility and surrender  
to this fact of pain

It will retreat in the night for a month or  
two

You can resume human disguise till its  
next advent

and masquerade as person sane intelligent  
loved and desirable Till the next time  
then

# Men And Women

## I

### Apropos A. P. Kartrak's 'Persephone'

Well yes. You're in the right there  
but rest easy for it's not all that daft  
you know nor dangerous the winning  
of her love  
or being safe in it so she don't erode  
eat away your self in scorn neglect lechery  
impotence  
It needs but little—control and patience  
as you say at love's orifices  
so she's there with you atop the wave  
and leaves her teeth in your shoulder and  
neck  
(otherwise you've had it she'll discard  
and seek)  
but also jewels flowers perfumes  
chocolates  
absurd bits of clothes allowance  
for pre-menstrual tensions and fears of  
pregnancy  
the greedy lapping up of her every trait—  
long hair or short

excess of inches or lack—

Ah leave nothing unpraised breast  
buttock

nose ear—but most of all remember to heap  
continuous accolade for the meagrest  
craft

be it ironing cooking making dolls of  
shells

however useless however small

Then certainly my friend after this insidious  
adulation amounting to obscenity  
you could turn her essential contempt  
for this great gowk of a creature her man  
inwards that she could with such ease  
be enslaved by your skillful hands  
beggar's heart and from himalayan heights  
condescend to warm your bed  
stiffen your manhood  
and bear your spawn



## RAKSHAT PURI

Past 45 years of age was educated at the Panjab University Was reporter and sub-editor on the Indian News Chronicle of Delhi now defunct Joined a Delhi weekly Thought then edited by Arthur Moore In 1957 became New Delhi correspondent for the New Statesman London In 1961 joined The Hindustan Times as its South East Asia correspondent Returned to New Delhi in 1968 Presently he is an Assistant Editor on The Hindustan Times

**Rakshat Puri**

**Six Variations**

## II

### At The Morgue

This stretch of misshapen time  
At the morgue received its sudden  
Stop in a celebration of laughter  
And screams as picnickers passed  
On a charabanc of rolling dreams

All flowers must begin and in the wooded  
Years the spring time boys heave no  
Sadness as they take their measure  
Of the honey bee's song  
And the rook's flight from a bow  
Of desire

In the deeps between sound and silence  
Where they say a music ascends like  
A fine mist to the last design  
Of knowledge the way is barred  
By the sun's gloss on itinerant gulls  
And thoughts vernal to summer seeds

The foam flecked profile of tomorrow's  
Receding wave dares the lusting grasp  
And the winged lunge

All flowers must end as we prepare  
To meet the dark when the wooded years  
Are still and the spring time boys  
Have gone with the gull and the honey bee,  
And a mishapen stretch of memory  
At the morgue resolves to the supple shapes  
Of a coming season



### III

#### Vacant Hours

The past plays tricks of fancy on  
The mind as it passes through  
The wastes of please and thank you

And duly celebration of wit and love  
And all the dynamism and drive  
Of clever men with clever wives

*Fragments return in vacant hours*  
Of voices stilled and dim gestures  
Old and fractured concerns

Now resolved again to new equations  
In a fine permutation of time  
And slides of memory

As the present wings to the dark  
Rooks flying home in the evening  
Silently

## Hare

A patch of burnt sienna  
 On the road where  
 The first houses raucous  
 In their heraldry meet  
 The traveller as he comes  
 Down from the north country

A patch with some hair  
 And two eyes left  
 Miraculously unobserved  
 To stare down the sky  
 As motorists avoid carefully  
 To fast their remains

In the usual  
 Conference of detail  
 The hare with perpetual  
 Vanishing grass in the air  
 Of its central city

## House Moving

It is a delicate operation needing  
A sensitive touch and a firm  
Grasp You feel your roots

Gently and without the slightest  
Faltering you shift the heavy stuff  
First of all then the middling items

Coming last to the flooring uprooting  
The bugs and roaches who seek  
Pamcky refuge

Then to the careful replanting  
The procedure reversed with first  
The flooring then the middle items  
And the heavy stuff last

The roots thrive with tending the bugs  
And roaches return neighbours  
Children plans ambitions trace  
The sectors of the city

Thus the perennial transplant  
The journey from habit to habit  
From life to life from  
Then to now

Those who cut adrift must blow  
To the setting sun across autumn

## **VI**

### **Multan**

On the highroad of history this  
City of graves dust and darveshes  
Has breathed traditionally the stormy

Clash of revolutions as men sought  
The elusive Meridian and fell  
Or passed silently to the crossroads  
Of knowledge

The revolutions of men are made  
In the lonely fires that burn them

Wiser in our loaded times  
We sit on their ashes rationally  
Sipping coffee as we sing  
Literature of protest  
In a slow dream of oases

## GIRVI PATEL

Born 1940

*Is a Medical practitioner and worked for three years at Primary Health Centre in Sanjan a large village in the process of becoming a small town. Continues practice in Bombay. Work includes Poems (1966) Prince a play produced by Theatre Group Bombay (1970). Is also a painter and translates from Gujarati into English. He is married with one child and lives in Bombay.*

# Gieve Patel

## University

Is there reason to believe the students  
Of Dacca University were better  
Than those of our own ? Need I repeat  
What I know so well from my college days—  
The dull corridors the vacuous library  
The children of the poor in  
Ill fitting clothes skulking  
In corners those of the rich  
Brilliant and febrile their sparrow brains  
Ringing like jingles in their skulls ?  
To be brutally shot why not is a kind of  
fate

—And the professors ! O professors  
Stale malodorous with yesterday's coats  
And neckties ! A small family  
Tucked away in the grimmest part of town  
Pitiful bank balance tame sheep at home  
At work holders of the flaming  
Mark sheet to terrify  
And subjugate monsters  
And gently to amuse the affluent  
Who know them harmless and by their first  
Name—fredy eddie peddie—  
Safe toys to smile at for two years





## How Do You Withstand Body

How do you withstand body  
Destruction repeatedly  
Aimed at you? Minutes  
Seconds like gun reports  
Tattoo you with holes  
Your area of five  
By four is not  
Room enough for  
The fists and the blows  
All instruments itch  
To make a hedgehog  
Of your hide Is that  
Reason poor slut  
To walk compliantly  
Before heroes?  
Offering in your  
Demolition  
A besotted kind of love  
Red and black gleaming  
Patches meat mouths  
For monsters kisses?

## Public Houses

How quickly I've ~~changed~~ <sup>changed</sup> <sup>my</sup> <sup>mind</sup>  
 It would seem as if ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> <sup>world</sup> <sup>had</sup> <sup>not</sup> <sup>yet</sup> <sup>been</sup> <sup>born</sup>  
 Awaited only the ~~world~~ <sup>world</sup> <sup>is</sup> <sup>born</sup>  
 Autocratic pose ~~over~~ <sup>over</sup> <sup>it</sup> <sup>is</sup> <sup>my</sup> <sup>own</sup>  
 Voice sharp ~~glow~~ <sup>glow</sup> <sup>in</sup> <sup>my</sup> <sup>eyes</sup>  
 A busy man's look of ~~letting~~ <sup>letting</sup>

Untroubled so to ~~van~~ <sup>van</sup> <sup>preoccupation</sup>  
 My fingers deft to ~~rescue~~ <sup>rescue</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>bodies</sup>,  
 Pull down clothing ~~in~~ <sup>in</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>soul</sup>  
 Give sorrow ear ~~to~~ <sup>to</sup> <sup>it</sup>  
 Then snub it ~~to~~ <sup>to</sup> <sup>it</sup>  
 Separate essential ~~from~~ <sup>from</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>rest</sup> <sup>of</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>world</sup>  
 Weed out ~~main~~ <sup>main</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>rest</sup> <sup>of</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>world</sup>  
 With patronage ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>stream</sup>  
 Of the underfed ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>in</sup> <sup>them</sup>  
 Then pack them ~~away~~ <sup>away</sup>

Almost  
 I tell myself  
 I embrace the ~~per-~~ <sup>per-</sup> <sup>fect</sup>  
 Revel in variety of ~~eye~~ <sup>eye</sup>, colour ~~check~~ <sup>check</sup>, ~~face~~ <sup>face</sup>

Unwelcome guest I may visit bodies  
 Touch close cure throw overboard  
 Necessities of ~~dance~~ <sup>dance</sup> <sup>plunge</sup>  
 Splice violate,

With needle knife and tongue  
Wreck all my bonds in them

At end of day  
From under the flagpole  
Watch the city streaming  
By the side of my hands

## To Exhaust The World Of Heroes

To exhaust the world of heroes  
Is to flush your own heart  
Clean Nobody  
Is good enough for me ! Each  
Prophet a two faced, fork tongued  
Creature How about ■ side kick  
To stride along with  
Through muck and mire ? Tolerate  
The leer of friendships which say  
We two we two everything shared  
Moults skin after skin to expose  
The cringing flesh of a need

## **To Make A Contract**

To make a contract as contracts  
Go quite arbitrary from  
A universe of images pick upon  
A tree or a rock or my fingers  
And declare them god Perform  
An act of worship—pare  
My fingernails and weep profoundly  
Before the crescents flying off  
My hand—why—choose rather  
A thing in the lowest scale  
Of credibility—dirt or faeces  
And run to it for sanctuary !

## ADIL JUSSAWALLA

Born 1940

*Educated at Oxford Taught at a  
Language School in London from 1965  
1970 Returned to Bombay in 1970  
One book of verse Lands End Has  
edited the Penguin Anthology Of  
New Indian Writing mostly in  
translation Teaches in St Xavier's  
College Bombay He is married and  
lives in Bombay*

## Adil Jussawalla

### Approaching Santa Cruz

Loud benedictions of the silver popes  
A cross to themselves above  
A union of homes as live as a disease  
Still though the earth be stunk and populous  
We're told it's not our Papa li put his nose  
Down on cleaner ground Soon to receive  
its due the circling heart encircled sees  
The various ways of dying that are home  
Dying is all the country's living for  
A doctor says we've lost all hope all pride  
I peer below The poor invisible  
Show me my place that in the air  
With the scavenger birds I ride

Economists enclosed in History's  
Chinese boxes citing Chairman Mao  
Know how a people nourished on decay  
Disintegrate or crash in civil war  
Contrarily the Indian diplomat  
Flying with me is confident the poor  
Will stay just as they are  
Birth  
Pyramids the future with more birth

Our only desert, space , to leave the green  
Burgeoning to black, the human pall  
The free  
Couples in their chains around the earth.

I take a second look / We turn  
Grazing the hills and catch a glimpse of sea.  
We are now approaching Santa Cruz    III  
Arguments are endless now and I  
Feel the guts tighten and all my senses

shake

The heart stirring to trouble in its clenched  
Claw shrivelled inside the casing of a cage  
Forever steel and foreign swoops to take  
Freedom for what it is    The slums sweep  
Up to our wheels and wings and nothing's free  
But singing while the benedictions pour  
Out of a closing sky    And this is home,  
Watched by a boy as still as a shut door,  
Holding a mass of breadcrumbs like a stone



## Nine Poems On Arrival

Spiders infest the sky  
They are palms you say  
hung in a web of light

Gingerly thinking of concealed  
springs and traps I step off the plane  
expect take-off on landing

Garlands beheading the body  
and everyone dressed in white  
Who are we ghosts of ?

You You You  
Shaking hands And you

Cold hands Cold feet I thought  
the sun would be lower here  
to wash my neck in

Contact. We talk a language of beads  
along well-established wires  
The beads slide they open they  
devour each other

Some were important  
■ that one  
as deep and dead as the horizon ?

Upset like water  
I dive for my favourite tree  
which is no longer there  
though they've let its roots remain

Dry clods of earth  
tighten their tiny faces  
in an effort to cry Back  
where I was born  
I may yet observe my own birth

## MAMTA MALIA

*Writes in Hindi and English In  
Hindi has published one book of  
short stories and one novel In  
English one collection of Poems  
Tribute to Papa and Other Poems  
She is married and lives in  
Allahabad*

# Mamta Kalia

## Tribute To Papa

Who cares for you Papa ?  
Who cares for your clean thoughts clean  
words clean teeth ?  
Who wants to be an angel like you ?  
Who wants it

You are an unsuccessful man Papa  
Couldn't wangle a cosy place in the world  
You've always lived a life of limited dreams

I wish you had guts Papa  
To smuggle eighty thousand watches at a  
stroke  
And I'd proudly say My father's in  
import export business you know  
I'd be proud of you then

But you've always wanted to be a model  
man

A sort of an ideal  
When you can't think of doing anything  
You start praying  
Spending useless hours at the temple

You want me to be like you Papa  
Or like Rani Lakshmbai  
You re not sure what greatness is  
But you want me to be great

I give two donkey-claps for your greatness  
And three for Rani Lakshmibai

These days I am seriously thinking of  
disowning you Papa  
You and your sacredness  
What if I start calling you Mr Kapur  
Lower Division Clerk Accounts  
Section?

Everything about you clashes with nearly  
everything about me  
You suspect I am having a love-affair  
these days  
But you're too shy to have it confirmed  
What if my tummy starts growing gradually  
And I refuse to have it curetted ?  
But I'll be careful Papa  
Or I know you'll at once think of suicide

shadow of the mosque's cool minars  
the flower seller  
himself going on tea and tabacco spit,  
traffic policeman pats his uniform  
before taking into his hand,  
polis and suburb  
g heavily from one into the other

cell of grilled liver and seekh kabab  
outbids

all of perfume on parked cars  
f goats and green leaves conveyed  
he highway's belt  
tep-pen cow pen

changes into  
blood and intestines  
ing with flies

you flick a tail at  
n into vultures over Slaughter  
House

re balcony at dusk  
znn calls

the Imam bends  
the congregation  
od His fourth meal of prayers



# **Salcem Peeradina**

## **Bandra**

I love the environs  
                    of your body  
and its many insights I recognise  
every gesture act every foul thought  
                    though I'll never understand  
your central purpose I do not wish to  
To grasp you is to cease to need you It is  
your incompleteness inconstancy  
                                    attaches me to you

You're more than a sea front town  
that came up the thoroughfare  
to the railway station And passed beyond  
                                    its toy towers  
to colonies that grew on your hands like  
                                    sixth fingers

More than a settlement  
of shops cafes cinemas churches  
hospitals schools parks  
                    Your mind is versatile

There s no place like

Bandstand

It s away

from home . If you ve tried the auditorium  
you ll find the rocks allow more  
elbow room

go on kissing

clothes and fish will dry in the sun  
an arse will be bared and lowered on the  
horizon  
boys hunting crabs will eye you with  
interest

you re anonymous here

Even

the pretty Goan ayah discards  
her curry stains adds Afghan snow and  
is ready to meet her greasy garagehand  
waiting  
also in clean bright Sunday disguise

\*

Give everyone

What you ve given us

the supermarket departments the small  
provision store the sitting procession of  
hawkers  
in the jostle of the road



to every hotdamp shitimmemorial lane  
everywhere

You're newly poor  
You're not even a true slum  
There's a place transcends your choice

Experts call it Asia's best ever area  
bred in superreal sewagewater  
you can see  
on any clear day coming north over the  
creek  
its swollen limb  
thrives like a running boil

Elsewhere  
a fellowship exists  
at roof level  
of blackened tiles and water tanks  
Of attic study facing the gallery kitchen  
facing  
the terrace bedroom  
Knocked out  
windows ; drainpipes skylight all blend  
lost in unbroken sleep

Awaken us on the heights  
of Pali Hill In its green  
lull Take us along  
wild hedges into expressive old bungalows

Shows us beings  
in whose healthy love of gardens  
resides a gift of flower and birdsong

There s no place like

Bandstand

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Give everyone

What you ve given us

the supermarket departments the small  
provision store the sitting procession of  
hawkers  
in the jostle of the road



Once

every year

sweep your other hull with lights  
dust with gold Mary of the Mount  
polish the chest of seen delights

your children

love to receive

with a dip and flourish of your wrinkled  
hand

\*

Preserve Us

Take all

evilspirits

driven into an offering

and dropped

from a train window

into creek water

o the sea

## JAYANTA MAHAPATRA

*Born and educated at Cuttack  
At present teaches Physics at  
Ravenshaw College Cuttack Two  
books of verse Close the Sky  
Ten by Ten and Svayamvara and  
Other Poems Editor Grey Book  
Translates from Oriya Has been  
published in Chicago Review The  
Critical Quarterly New York  
Quarterly and other American  
University Journals Has recently  
edited special issue on Indian  
Poetry for South and West*

# Jayanta Mahapatra

## Swayamvara

To concede embracing a barrier of time  
blue veined kings vie with earthly gods  
immured in this image of their own  
becoming  
where the fairy tale princess of fecund grace  
took one step into the deep-qualmed race  
and understood that beneath  
all their different acts of pride  
and love modesty and age  
lurks the fear of inadequacy's edge  
they were each one together one  
unrealised drugged and brief stimuli  
of encounter withdrawn of their prey

While langour softly grips her belled  
feet  
and sweeping across their starkly rigid  
looks  
a victor's walk holds to walled wait  
some slender hope of resolute heroes  
nevertheless of chance denied but one  
absorbed to build himself an ultimate  
god

## PRITISH NANDY

Born 1947

*Eight books of verse in print also many translations including Poems from Bangla Desh Editor Indian Poetry in English 1947 72 Delhi and Dialogue India a monthly Collected Poems have just been published Presently he is public relations director for an industrial house He is married with two children and lives in Calcutta*

## **Yours Was A Fearful Secret Whispered In The Heart's Confessional**

yours was a fearful secret whispered in the heart's  
confessional

a night bird's laughter echoing in an empty  
room

the chalice of night painfully fills as dusk re-  
treats behind squat mountains in silhouette  
and an angry squall drapes you in burning  
silk

silk is your revenous dark hair cascading onto  
bare white shoulders

■ slow sensual flame licking the wounds of the  
rain

as his hands clutched his torn belly and he fell  
the sun perplexed and pale saw a flaming village  
cremate his corpse



## He Returned Towards Silence

he returned towards silence with stardust in his eyes

it was evening and from the brooding minarets  
of the purple mosque he heard the muezzin's  
phantom cry

and as he signed his name on the faded leaves of  
shravan the night came like a savage rite

she stood ancient in her grief beside the greying  
manuscript of time and waited for him

as he returned towards silence with stardust in  
his eyes

## Near Deshapriya Park They Found Him At Last

near Deshapriya Park they found him at last  
nicotine stained teeth clenched in despair and  
his long dirty grey hair reaching into the night  
blood casually signed a wound that need not have  
been there

for he was already dead

even when he sat on that broken bench wonder  
ing about seven pairs of eyes and hunger that  
had tracked him there

when they asked him to go they had not known  
it would come to this

an empty chair and three files less business  
went on as usual in Monohardas Katra

seven pairs of eyes and hunger waited for him in  
that one room where he returned every night  
except one

when they found him near Deshapriya Park  
■ last

his nicotine stained teeth clenched in despair and  
his long dirty grey hair reaching into the night

## Calcutta If You Must Exile Me

*Calcutta if you must exile me wound my lips  
before I go*

only words remain and the gentle touch of your  
finger on my lips Calcutta burn my eyes before I  
go into the night

the headless corpse in a Dhakuria bylane the  
battered youth his brains blown out and the  
silent vigil that takes you to Pataldanga Lane  
where they will gun you down without vengeance  
or hate

*Calcutta if you must exile me burn my eyes before  
I go*

they will pull you down from the Ochterlony  
monument and torture each broken rib beneath  
your upthrust breasts they will tear the anguish  
from your sullen eyes and thrust the bayonet  
between your thighs

Calcutta they will tear you apart Jarasandha  
like

they will tie your hands on either side and hang  
you from a wordless cross and when your silence  
protests they will execute all the words that you

met and synchronised Calcutta they will burn  
you at the stake

Calcutta flex the vengeance in your thighs and  
burn silently in the despair of flesh

if you feel like suicide take a rickshaw to  
Sonagachhi and share the sullen pride in the  
eyes of women who have wilfully died

wait for me outside the Ujjala theatre and I will  
bring you the blood of that armless leper who  
went mad before hunger and death met in his  
wounds

I will show you the fatigue of that woman who  
died near Chitpur out of sheer boredom and the  
cages of Burrabazar where passion hides in the  
wrinkles of virgins who have aged waiting for a  
sexless war that never came

only obscene lust remains in their eyes after  
time has wintered their exacting thighs

and I will show you the hawker who died with  
Calcutta in his eyes

*Calcutta if you must exile me destroy my sanity  
before I go*

the centaur's deathwish

death's

the

pattern

skeletoned

a secret

against

grudge

history's

the

broken

steeple

moral dreams

a whirlwind

clutching at

*of sorrows*

## PRIYA KARUNAKAR

Born 1946

*Educated in Delhi and New York  
where she worked on Happenings  
and Inter Media Since 1970 has  
lectured reviewed art free lanced  
for newspapers and magazines  
Continues writing and at present  
working on an allegorical poem  
in prose*

# Pria Karunakar

## Avatar Part V

We met in the wilderness  
And ■ we came to camp we three  
Giving the camels to crop  
We discussed avidly  
When the first cerebral heat abated  
Exchange of divination technique  
And ripened cycle of time agreed on  
We each sank into our own thoughts  
Watching the nervous flame lick the cold air  
That which lives in fire  
To which fire is the body  
Whom the fire does not understand  
That ■ Self Controller and Perceiver  
The African—quick from Osirian Mysteries  
Gave a deep belly laugh  
The Persian heard aghast the clamour  
Abura Mazd pitted spear to spear with Dark

And I a Vaishnavite  
Reflected on the sequence of avatars  
Fish eye turtle ramping boar and ravening lion  
The stride that covered all three worlds  
(Yet hardly that Perceiver's self) and then





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*For Kalpana Quest*

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**KAMALA DAS**

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